



INTERAGENCY CONNECTION

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Strategic Connections resulting in Unique Solutions

Chair's Corner



The first full week of this month is **Public Service Recognition Week** (May 6-12, 2018)! This year's theme is *Connecting Citizens with their Government*. Our FEB will be showcasing individual accomplishments during our annual **FEB**

Awards Ceremony on Monday, May 7th. I hope you have already registered to attend! In addition to our huge luncheon to celebrate the individual accomplishments, we will be showcasing the federal agencies in our area by posting mission-related videos on our Oklahoma FEB Facebook page. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/HoustonFEB/> to view the many videos we have received!

Our FEB has coordinated a one-day "**Crisis Communications**" training designed for agency leaders that get the microphone in their face during a crisis without looking bad or appear as though you are "hiding something"!

The day is scheduled for Tuesday, June 5, 2018 and is designed for a small group of 12 who will learn:

- How to maintain a positive relationship with the media in the first hours of a crisis.
- How to be a team player rather than merely an individual agency spokesperson.

- How to maintain a good media relationship after the crisis is over.

What to expect:

- A quick primer on what to expect from persistent, aggressive reporters covering your problem, crisis or event.
- A total of three on-camera exercises. Each exercise is critiqued in an open forum by the instructor.
- Training based on a realistic scenario chosen by the client.
- Instructors and role players with significant journalism and media relations experience.

This is a small, "hands-on" type of training to prepare agency leaders in response to requests received from several of you in a "lessons learned" post-Harvey. With the small class capacity design, you will want to register as soon as possible.

Our Federal Executive Board will be represented at the **National FEB meeting** in Washington, DC in July to learn new national initiatives and issues that may affect our local agencies. Look for information about that in our August or September newsletter.

Tim Jeffcoat, Chairman

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Conflict Resolution

Using the "Interest-Based Relational" Approach

Conflict is an inevitable part of work. We've all seen situations where people with different goals and needs have clashed, and we've all witnessed the often intense personal animosity that can result.

The fact is, that conflict exists; however, is not necessarily a bad thing. When you resolve it effectively, you can also eliminate many of the hidden problems that it brought to the surface.

There are other benefits that you might not expect, such as:

- Increased understanding. Going through the process of resolving conflict expands people's awareness, and gives them an insight into how they can achieve their goals without undermining others.
- Better group cohesion. When you resolve conflict effectively, team members can develop stronger mutual respect, and a renewed faith in their ability to work together.
- Improved self-knowledge. Conflict pushes individuals to examine their goals and expectations closely, helping them to understand the things that are most important to them, sharpening their focus, and enhancing their effectiveness.

But conflict can also be damaging. If you don't handle it effectively, it can quickly turn into personal dislike, teamwork can break down, and talent may be wasted as people disengage from their work and leave.

If you want to keep your team members working effectively, despite coming into conflict with one another, you need to stop this downward spiral as soon as you can. To do this, it helps to understand one of the key processes for effective conflict resolution: the Interest-Based Relational approach.

The Interest-Based Relational Approach

When conflict arises, it's easy for people to get entrenched in their positions and for tempers to flare, voices to rise, and body language to become defensive or [aggressive](#). You can avoid all of this by using the Interest-Based Relational (IBR) approach.

Roger Fisher and William Ury developed the IBR approach and published it in their 1981 book, ["Getting to Yes."](#) They argue that you should resolve conflicts by separating people and their emotions from the problem. Their approach also focuses on building mutual respect and understanding, and it encourages you to resolve conflict in a united, cooperative way.

The approach is based on the idea that your role as a

manager is not simply to resolve conflict but to ensure that team members feel respected and understood, and that you appreciate their differences. In essence, it helps you to manage conflict in a civil and "grown up" way.

During the process, your focus should be on behaving courteously and consensually, and on insisting that others do the same. Your priority is to help each side develop an understanding of the other's position, and to encourage both to reach a consensus – even if that means agreeing to disagree.

To use the IBR approach effectively, everyone involved should listen [actively](#) and [empathetically](#), have a good understanding of [body language](#), be [emotionally intelligent](#), and understand how to employ different [anger management](#) techniques. In particular, you and the conflicting parties need to follow these six steps:

1. Make sure that good relationships are a priority. Treat the other person with respect. Do your best to be courteous, and to discuss matters constructively.
2. Separate people from problems. Recognize that, in many cases, the other person is not "being difficult" – real and valid differences can lie behind conflicting positions. By separating the problem from the person, you can discuss issues without damaging relationships.
3. Listen carefully to different interests. You'll get a better grasp of why people have adopted their position if you try to understand their point of view.
4. Listen first, talk second. You should listen to what the other person is saying before defending your own position. They might say something that changes your mind.
5. Set out the "facts." Decide on the observable facts that might impact your decision, together.
6. Explore options together. Be open to the idea that a third position may exist, and that you might reach it jointly.

You can often prevent contentious discussions from turning bad by following these guidelines, and they can help you avoid the antagonism and dislike that can cause conflict to spiral out of control.

However, bear in mind that the IBR approach may not be appropriate for all situations. For example, you may not be able to resolve differences in such a consensual, collaborative way if your organization is in a crisis. On these occasions, you may have to "pull rank" as a leader and make quick decisions about disputes and conflicts.

https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_81.htm

Creating Unnecessary Work?

How do we get lost in the trivial activities of the workday?

Two reasons: Equality and Perfectionism

1. *Equality at Work* is a lie.

Not all activities at work are equal, yet we think and act with this paralyzing thought.

"Every activity is equal...and it all must get done."

We quickly find ourselves in the weeds of reoccurring themes:

- Overcommitted
- Overworked
- Overwhelmed

To prove my point, what were the three most important activities that you accomplished last week?

Shift your mindset: Act Less and Think More

We spend our day combating internal thoughts of worthiness and productivity, and we masquerade them by staying busy.

2. *Everything has to be perfect.*

Perfectionism leads to micromanaging of employees, projects, and long work days.

Perfectionism is like going outside with a pair of scissors after you have cut the grass to see if you missed any grass blades.

Think of perfectionism as a virus in the body that is working against itself.

Instead of creating new ideas and solving reoccurring problems, we are continually experiencing feelings of guilt and dissatisfaction.

To overcome this habit created over many years, we need to do two things:

1. Work to obtain 70-80% completion
2. Ask for help

by Eric Papp

For 1 Day Productivity Training for your staff contact www.ericpapp.com

Study: When Dog Tired, You Are Eight Times More Likely to Be in Crash



Crashes involving drowsy drivers occur at a rate nearly eight times higher than federal estimates indicate,

according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

AAA released findings of a study in February that indicated 9.5% of all crashes and 10.8% of crashes resulting in significant property damage involved drowsiness. To achieve peak performance, adults need seven to nine hours of sleep each day, according to the National Safety Council.

More than 43% of workers are sleep-deprived and those most at risk work nights or irregular shifts. The impact in workplace settings can be profound:

- Sleep problems can cost employers up to \$2,500 per employee every year in lost productivity

Use the [NSC Fatigue Cost Calculator](#) to get a tailored estimate of costs at your organization.

On the road, NSC research shows:

- You are three times more likely to be in a car crash if you are fatigued
- Losing even two hours of sleep is similar to the effect of having three beers
- Being awake for more than 20 hours is the equivalent of being legally drunk

AAA safety tips to share:

- Avoid driving after taking medications that cause drowsiness
- Schedule a break every two hours or every 100 miles
- Travel with an alert passenger and take turns driving

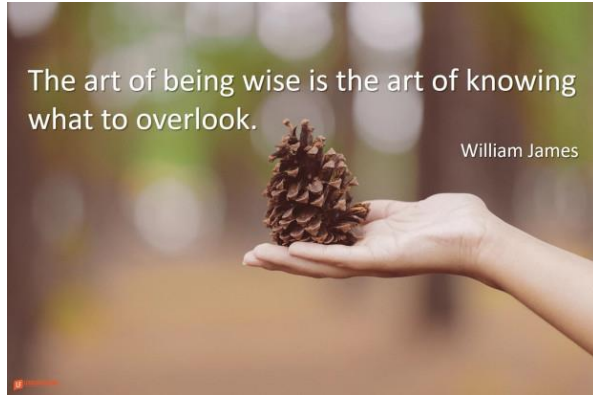
Get [fatigue fact sheets and infographics](#) from NSC to share with your workforce. Watch: [Time for All of Us to Wake Up to the Problem of Drowsy Driving](#).

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU MANAGE ISN'T PROJECTS OR PEOPLE

Someone or something is controlling your attention. Often it's not you. Maybe it's an email alert or a buzzing cell phone.

Distracted leaders live inconsequential lives.

The most important thing you manage is your attention.



Need for distraction:

Our need for distraction is so strong that when we aren't distracted by notifications, we look at our cell phones to be sure we haven't missed something.

Something designed to make you more effective – notifications – makes you less efficient.

Notification distracts attention.

Meaningful work:

All meaningful work requires undistracted attention. That's why you leave the office to get deep work done.

Interruption dilutes attention.

Nobel Prize winner [Herbert A. Simon](#) explained that information consumes attention.

"A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention." Simon

More: [How Distraction-Addicts Find Focus](#)

#1. Manage attention by eliminating distraction.

"The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook." William James

#1. Schedule shallow work between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. These are the most distracted hours of the day for most.

#2. Eliminate distracting thoughts by writing them down. You think, "Oh, I need to stop by accounting today." Write it down.

Help your brain focus by writing down distractions.

#3. Eliminate external distractions. I'm working in a poorly lit room. It's dark outside. I'm ignoring email. No one is around. It's quiet. In this context time slows. In a couple hours I'll come back to reality with an article to post.

1. Close your office door.
2. Turn off notifications.
3. Open ONE browser window.

#2. Manage attention with leadership intention.

Show up with two intentions.

1. Establish and strengthen meaningful connection. *The key to connection is paying attention.* (Inspired by Jeff Klein's [TEDx talk](#).)
2. Accomplish relevant work. Organizational mission, vision, and values define meaningful work.

Repeat two questions:

1. How might you establish and strengthen connection?
2. How relevant is this work?

<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2018/03/16/the-most-important-thing-you-manage-isnt-projects-or-people/>

Becoming an Active Listener

There are five key active listening techniques. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts.
- Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
- "Listen" to the speaker's [body language](#).

2. Show That You're Listening

- Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.
- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.

3. Provide Feedback

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say." "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.

Tip:

If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said

personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?"

4. Defer Judgment

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
- Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

5. Respond Appropriately

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.

- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.

Key Points

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, and if your listening skills are as bad as many people's are, then there's a lot of habit-breaking to do!

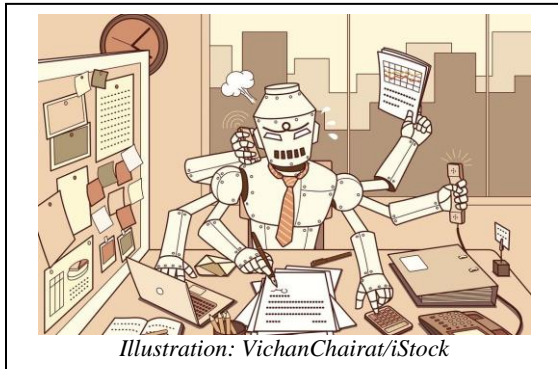
Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently that your goal is to truly hear what the other person is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviors and concentrate on the message. Ask questions, reflect, and paraphrase to ensure you understand the message. If you don't, then you'll find that what someone says to you and what you hear can be amazingly different!

Start using active listening techniques today to become a better communicator, improve your workplace productivity, and develop better relationships.

Read the full article at:

<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/ActiveListening.htm>

Where Do Humans Outperform AI? *Machines are better at repetitive tasks, but people have an advantage when it comes to working with their hands.*



It's easy sometimes to think of artificial intelligence as everybody's younger, smarter sibling: brilliant and talented, a source of family pride, but also kind of insufferable about it (and maybe even, eventually, a [little dangerous](#)). We already knew the kid was good at [chess](#) and [Go](#), and that's cool. Who really plays Go, anyway? But almost every day now, we hear about something else AI can do better than even the best members of the human clan.

Just recently, we've seen AI, which was known for crunching numbers, outperform human lawyers at [reviewing legal documents](#). And it can [read human handwriting](#) better than humans can. And it can [translate Chinese](#) as well as human translators. Throw those in with AI's previous merit badges for [diagnosing diseases](#), [discovering an exoplanet](#) 2,545 light years away, [negotiating a compromise](#) and a hundred other tasks and you might start wondering: What's left for humans?

Hands on

Quite a lot, actually, at least for now. For starters, although machines have always been better at repetitive tasks, humans still have a big advantage in most things that involve working with your hands. Robotics developers have made significant advances in recent years, but there is still a lot of

expense, haptic technology and other factors involved. Getting a robot to [open a door](#) is still a big deal, so robots aren't going to be performing a lot of maintenance, plumbing, electrical work or other handsy jobs in the near future. AI will likely be assisting people in those tasks, but people will still do the job.

Human interactions are another area where humans, as you might suspect, hold sway.

Sales, for instance, requires a level of empathy to help convince a customer of the benefits of a product or service. (And cynically, a measure of deceit machines aren't programmed for if the goal is to bamboozle a customer.) Counseling in any realm also would be beyond a narrowly focused machine — an AI assistant can answer factual questions, recommend restaurants and supposedly [find you a date](#), but good advice or purposeful listening is another matter. And while AI, like other programs, could prove to be a valuable teacher's aide, it can't replace a teacher, even the most boring ones.

Despite advances in natural language processing that enable AI systems to sound human when communicating, the thought behind those words is lacking, which is evident when it comes to creative forms of communicating.

Readin' 'n' Writin'

AI is making strides here, too, but not as impressively as it might seem at first. [Microsoft](#) and the Chinese e-commerce giant [Alibaba](#) separately reported early this year they had developed AI systems that matched or bested humans in reading comprehension. Each company said their AI models had scored slightly higher than humans in the Stanford University reading and comprehension test, a respected

machine reading test. The scores in the test, reflecting the percentage of correct answers to 100,000 questions drawn from 536 Wikipedia entries: Microsoft, 82.650; Alibaba, 82.44; humans, 82.304.

But as *The Verge* explains in a [breakdown of the test](#), the questions are pretty basic and reward recall of small details in answer to questions that use the same wording used in the text. In other words, the kind of stuff machines are naturally better at. The test, after all, is designed to measure machine performance, not human comprehension.

As Percy Liang, one of the Stanford computer scientists that compiled the test, told *The Verge*: “Even elementary school reading comprehensions are harder, because they often include questions like ‘Why did X do this?’ ... So they’re a lot more interpretive. We’re not even tackling those more open-ended types of questions.”

So, while AI is superior at crunching large data sets and recognizing patterns — the kind of tasks reviewing legal documents could involve — humans are still much better at critical thinking and applying lessons learned. Human lawyers and judges will decide what to do with AI’s research. That’s why AI companies are rife with new hires, enlisting people to decide what to do with AI data and results, and why Gartner predicts that by 2020, AI will [create more jobs than it eliminates](#).

Critical thinking, empathy and the other elements of “general AI” — that is, a machine that can actually think and act like a human — also apply to creativity. Machines have, for a while, been programmed to create music, poetry, fiction, even mathematical proofs. And although the results aren’t always completely terrible, they lack the inspiration of what humans

produce.

A London computer scientist last year trained an AI bot to churn out poems in different styles on different topics, based on 7 million words found in 20th century English poetry, [New Scientist](#) reported. The program strung together words that sort of sounded like poetry, but lacked subtext or new ideas.

*The frozen waters that are dead are now
black as the rain to freeze a boundless sky,
and frozen ode of our terrors with
the grisly lady shall be free to cry.* – AI poetry

AI programs also need a lot of help in writing fiction. A short-form novel co-written by an AI system achieved a milestone when it [was accepted](#) into the Hoshi Shinichi Literary Award competition in Japan in 2016, a first for AI-generated prose. But its co-authors were a computer science team at the Future University in Hakodate that outlined the plot, fed the machine words, phrases and sentences, and generally worked at the AI’s elbow in writing the story. So, AI won’t need to clear a place on its mantle for the Nobel just yet. And no way could it win a [Bad Hemingway](#) contest.

AI can do certain jobs better than humans, but so can a blender. The fear of a world ruled by machines might someday be realized, but for now, they’re still machines, best viewed as tools that can help humans do their own jobs better, and little more.

<https://governmentciomedia.com/where-do-humans-outperform-ai>



Crisis Communications Spokespersons Training for Executives and Senior Leaders



| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Date: | Tuesday, June 5, 2018 |
| Time: | 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. |
| Location: | Leland Building, 1919 Smith Street, 10 th Floor, Houston (Bayou Room) |
| Why? | <p>Focusing on the things that can “make” or “break” senior leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to maintain a positive relationship with the media in the first hours of a crisis. • How to be a team player rather than merely an individual agency spokesperson. • How to maintain a good media relationship after the crisis is over. |
| Topics: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quick primer on what to expect from persistent, aggressive reporters covering your problem, crisis or event. • A total of three on-camera exercises. Each exercise is critiqued in an open forum by the instructor. • Training based on a realistic scenario chosen by the client. • Instructors and role players with significant journalism and media relations experience. |
| Who Should Attend? | Agency Leaders, Senior Managers that have agency responsibility that would place them in a situation to be approached by the media in the event of a natural or man-made disaster. |
| Cost: | \$1,175.00 per person |

Registration

Name _____ Agency _____

Address: _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Position Title: _____

Register early! This class will be limited to twelve participants!

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Mail registration to: | Federal Executive Board 2320 La Branch Street, Rm 1107 Houston, TX 77004 |
| Email to: | Gerald.Poole@gsa.gov |

Cancellation Policy: Understanding that unforeseen circumstances may preclude an individual from attending, cancellations will be permitted through May 29, 2018. However, after that date, registrations must be honored by the individual or agency involved. If you are unable to attend, substitute attendees are authorized and encouraged!